

Central Intelligence Agency

DATE 10-15-87 ^{FILE}
DOC NO SOV M 87-20070
EUR M 87-20093
OIR 3
P & PD 1



Washington, D. C. 20505

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

29 June 1987

Soviet and East German Reaction to an Allied Berlin Initiative

Summary

The initial Soviet and East German reaction to President Reagan's Berlin proposals was strongly and predictably negative, although there is some evidence that Moscow is willing to entertain practical measures for improving the situation of the city and its inhabitants. We believe, however, that absent a sharp cooling of Soviet-West German relations the initial Soviet and East German reaction to the President's Berlin initiative will eventually be overcome by the logic of renewed negotiation on the status of the city. [redacted]

We continue to believe that the Soviets would see a US initiative to renegotiate the air regime over East Germany as an opportunity to undermine Western rights in Berlin. In 1984 the Soviets themselves suggested a similar renegotiation on the air corridors. A willingness to enter talks now would complement the positive image the Soviets have already acquired through their arms control posture while opening the possibility of imposing greater Soviet controls over air traffic to Berlin. In a post-INF era, Gorbachev would likely value Berlin negotiations more highly. [redacted]

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] the Office of Soviet Analysis and by [redacted] the Office of European Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to Chief, European Assessments division, [redacted]

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The East Germans would probably object to certain aspects of the US initiative--particularly those highlighting Allied rights in Berlin and the corridors. Moscow's sensitivity to East Berlin's concerns over the proposal's restatement of four-power rights would be another complicating factor. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The opportunity offered by the changes in the status quo and the chance to become directly involved, however, could bring East Berlin to overlook the drawbacks. The East Germans would be particularly attracted to the prospect of expanding flights to Western Europe. [REDACTED]

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More generally and perhaps most significantly, it is the East Germans who have been most aggressive in trying to change the status of Berlin because they have always had the most to gain from changes. They will probably come to see the President's initiative as broad enough to allow them to focus on some particular aspects that could give them openings to enhance their claim to unilateral sovereignty over East Berlin and to a role over international arrangements concerning West Berlin. [REDACTED]

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The NSC 10-Point Program

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1. The Soviets and East Germans have repeatedly asserted their interpretation of the Quadripartite Agreement of 1971--that quadripartite rights apply only to West Berlin and that East Berlin is the capital of the GDR. The East Germans reject the concept of a "greater Berlin," and only grudgingly accept the reality of the air corridors. To avoid alienating its client, Moscow has followed a convoluted logic of insisting on maintenance of its four-power status, while accepting GDR control in East Berlin and generally supporting or abetting efforts to undercut the legal basis for the allied presence in the city. [REDACTED]

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2. Both Moscow and East Berlin approve in theory of practical improvements in the situation of Berlin, but they take a jaundiced view of the increasing FRG official presence in West Berlin and construe statements on German unity as direct challenges to the postwar territorial settlements codified in the Helsinki Accords. [REDACTED]

3. The Soviets have tried to turn the President's call for openness in foreign affairs by Moscow into a propaganda ploy by arguing that West German and FRG police suppression of rioters in West Berlin was the kind of freedom the President meant. We would expect the Soviets and their allies to use similar tactics in responding to future Western calls for openness. This would be

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in line with Gorbachev's demonstrated preference for counterattack when challenged. The President's call for openness would add to the problems of the East German regime which is already fending off internal stirrings for democratization as a result of Gorbachev's openness in the USSR. [redacted]

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4-5, 7. The Soviets would be concerned that the proposed initiative will bring Bonn and Washington closer together on East-West issues. Moscow almost certainly will object to--or seek to block--any attempts to strengthen ties between West Berlin and West Germany, especially the authorization of West German airline (Lufthansa) flights to the city. [redacted]

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[redacted] the GDR can be expected to balk at an increase in the commercial use of West Berlin's airports because the status of East Berlin's Schoenefeld airport as the city's premier airport would be undercut. This is a source of "national" pride to a government intent on promoting "the capital of the GDR." Moreover, an expansion of the east-west or north-south flights could undermine the significant hard currency earnings the GDR now reaps from West Berliners' use of Interflug flights from Schoenefeld. A mitigating factor in such calculations would be how lenient Western terms were for regular intra-German air service--that is, how remunerative such service would be and how large an East German presence would be allowed in the FRG. The greatest obstacle would probably be the proposal to allow Lufthansa service to West Berlin, an idea vehemently denounced by East German leaders in the past. [redacted]

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6. We believe the Soviets would be favorably disposed to a change in Allied flight profiles in the corridors. The Soviet chief air controller in Berlin in 1984 informally raised a similar idea as a means of resolving Allied concerns over the number of corridor reservations. They may also try to expand the agenda to suit their own interests and try to codify other changes in the current regime, such as setting ceilings, or even reasserting their claim that Soviet interests and needs take precedence in the corridors. [redacted]

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East Germany would be obliged to hew to the Soviet line on this, but in principle the GDR would welcome any initiative on the air regime in which it was recognized as an actively

interested party. The GDR has long detested the air corridors as an infringement on its sovereignty. Its 1983 "Air Law" sets forth its claim to full sovereignty over its airspace except where existing agreements are in effect. [REDACTED]

8.-10. The Soviets will probably see opportunities in these proposals to further their position on the status of East Germany as an independent nation and East Berlin as its capital but will follow the East Germans' lead on these issues up to the point when Soviet interests begin to be adversely affected. [REDACTED]

The East Germans undoubtedly fear the loss of control over the flow of people through the Wall implied by the Olympic proposal and other uses of all of Berlin for international fora. The embarrassment of expressing such reservations openly may explain the rather vague criticisms of the Olympic idea offered by the East German leaders. [REDACTED]

Soviet and East European Reaction
to the President's Berlin Address

Soviet reaction to President Reagan's Berlin speech and attending ceremonies has been strongly negative. In public and semiformal discussions the Soviets have accused the President of violating the Quadripartite Agreement by officially meeting West German government leaders there. They also have reviled the idea of a continuing "German question" and denounced the President's alleged pandering to "revanchists" who challenge the postwar territorial settlements codified in the Helsinki Accords. In addition, Soviet commentators have mocked the alleged inconsistency in the President's remarks on combining arms control and a militarily strong West. [redacted]

The Soviets have been particularly cutting about the President's challenge to tear down the Berlin Wall. Their comments have ranged from a dismissal of the idea as a platitude to labelling the President a hypocrite for demanding the destruction of the "antifascist ramparts." The common line, however, has been that the call for the Wall's destruction was unfortunate and would restore the city to a "front line" status and encourage revanchism while inciting nationalist fervor. At the same time, Moscow has reprinted nearly verbatim stories from East German media that attempt to overshadow the President's address by linking the demonstrations in West Berlin to alleged public opposition to US policies. [redacted]

The East European View

East German reaction to the President's Berlin address has been unusually harsh. His call to remove the Berlin Wall was rejected out of hand as "provocative." Last week Margot Honecker, the East German education minister and wife of the country's leader, publicly rejected efforts to "open up" GDR society and said it was necessary to guard against those who would "inflict damage" on socialism. The President's speech was cited as an example of the latter danger. [redacted]

East German media have consistently decried the alleged violation of the Quadripartite Agreement by the President's meeting in the city with FRG President von Weizsaecker and Chancellor Kohl, and the use of FRG police for security during the President's visit. In addition, GDR leaders have criticized the President's suggestions on holding the Olympics and various international meetings in the city as "unrealistic." Thus far, no public reaction has been noted on the President's suggestions on greater use of Berlin as an air hub for Central Europe. [redacted]

Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia and especially Poland have devoted significant commentary to the President's speech. Criticism in both countries has focused on the supposed reopening of the German question and the ostensible encouragement of "revanchist" elements in the FRG. [REDACTED]

A Break in the Clouds?

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There is a possibility that Moscow will reconsider the President's suggestions. Last week, during his initial courtesy call on the US Minister in West Berlin, Soviet Minister Maksimychew was willing to accept the fact that the President's speech was indicative of a genuine US desire to make improvements in Berlin's situation. These private comments may indicate that Moscow would be willing to look for areas of pragmatic cooperation. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: Soviet and East German Reaction to an Allied Berlin Initiative

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